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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MADHI MILITIA ACTIVITY ON THE RISE IN BABIL PROVINCE

REF: A) HILLAH 80, B) HILLAH 85, AND C) HILLAH 93

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CLASSIFIED BY: Douglas Meurs, DRC, REO Al Hillah, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is a Babil PRT cable.

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)2. (S) Throughout the second half of May and into early June, the Madhi Militia (MM and also commonly referred to as Jaysh al Mahdi or JAM) has increased its presence in Al-Hillah and Babil, engaging in overt attacks directed against Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), civilians and Coalition Forces (CF). In addition to kinetic attacks and placement of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), MM units appear more willing to engage in public intimidation, even in normally quiet Babil. For example, the recent attacks against Al-Fayhaa newspaper and an America's Democracy Foundation (ADF, a USAID contractor organization) sponsored event appear to be coordinated and indicative of an upward spike in activity. Moreover, the Regional Embassy Office (REO) continues to receive reports that the MM is fueling sectarian divides between Sunni and Shi'a tribes in the northern part of Babil Province. Despite attempts by the Babil police forces to curb the rise of militia violence, local contacts report that the MM is augmenting its numbers and expanding its influence. The reason for the rise in activities is clear, as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) tightens its grip around provincial governing bodies, the MM and the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS), seeks to prevent their own political marginalization. The drawing-down of CF in the southern Babil may encourage the proliferation of MM activities.  
END SUMMARY.

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BACKGROUND: MADHI MILITIA ORGANIZATION IN BABIL  
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[1](#)3. (C) The MM is an armed group, directed by Moqtada Al-Sadr, a radical anti-American Shi'a Islamist spiritual leader from Najaf. REO and PRT contacts describe most of the militia's members as young, poor, uneducated Shi'a males drawn to the organization for nationalistic and religious reasons. The MM is present in almost all large towns in Babil. Unlike SCIRI/Badr (septel) the MM does not have significant control of governmental institutions in Babil Province, nor sizeable influence over the provincial security forces.

¶4. (S) PRT contacts have offered a general picture of MM structure and operations in Babil over the course of several recent meetings. Different contacts have echoed a similar theme, arguing that MM represents a growing threat to the province as it expands organizational and technological abilities to conduct operations against ISF and the civilian population. MM representatives have stated publicly that the organization is purely political and that members are no longer armed, contrary to U.S. military reports. While this is definitely not the case, local contacts and CF, however, stress that the MM's organizational capabilities in Babil are less developed than those of the MM in Baghdad or other regions in South-Central.

¶5. (S) REO and PRT contacts maintain that the MM in Babil is structured along the lines of a typical military organizational hierarchy, composed of platoon to battalion-sized units. According to Babil Police Chief General Qais Hamza Aboud Al-Momouri, a MM battalion normally consists of 800 individuals (COMMENT: It is likely that this number is exaggerated. U.S. military reports indicate that a MM battalion is composed of a maximum of 150 individuals and that it is difficult for the leadership to deploy even a small fraction of this total number for operations. END COMMENT). Qais also detailed that the MM is presently manufacturing and deploying increasingly advanced technology such as Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs) for use against ISF. The U.S. military in northern Babil has reported the existence of MM special operations groups, including one unit known as "Sariah Al-Muqtar Al-Thakafi" (SMT). SMT's primary task is to assassinate Sunnis in northern Babil in order to fuel sectarian conflicts. Its secondary mission, is to attack U.S. military and Coalition targets, making it the only MM contingent authorized to conduct operations against CF in Babil.

¶6. (S) While Moqtada Al-Sadr, according to the Babil Police Chief General Qais and the U.S. military, controls the overall operations of the MM in South-Central Iraq from Najaf, regional commanders responsible for individual provinces have assumed the

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authority to undertake independent actions. According to one U.S. military report, the last time Al-Sadr issued a direct operational order to regional commanders was at the end of February 2006, when terrorists bombed two Shi'a mosques in Samarra. Most MM attacks, according to Qais, are not linked to an overall MM strategy in South-Central, but tend to be directed against tactical targets of opportunity. (COMMENT: The U.S. Army's Second Brigade Combat Team reports that MM has conducted retaliatory EFP strikes against CF in response to U.S. military operations. END COMMENT). Qais added that MM senior leadership has received extensive Iranian support, although the rank and file tend to be young, poor and unaware of the outside influence.

¶7. (S) In Babil Province, according to U.S. military reports, the MM operates one main office located in Al-Hillah, and has branch offices in most major cities. The MM has divided each branch office into four units, known as the political, educational, media, and social committees. According to the U.S. military, the political committee is responsible for reporting information to the main office. The social committee partakes in cleaning streets, directing traffic, selling propane, establishing guard schedules and announcing blood drives. The media committee selects speakers and teachers for Friday prayers and monitors religious celebrations, while the education committee is responsible for religious instruction.

¶8. (S/NF) According to sources on the Babil Provincial Council (PC), Al-Sadr had recently asked Sheikh Ibrahim Hamdi to assume the position of commander of all MM forces in Babil. Hamdi declined the offer, stating that he had no desire to be responsible for bloodshed in Babil and Al-Hillah. Turning to a second choice, the source contends, Sadr requested that Sheikh Muhannad from southern Babil to head the MM in the province. Muhannad, known for attacks against ISF according to the source,

was reportedly selected by Sadr to specifically increase MM kinetic activities in the province. Regardless of the current leadership, MM attacks in Babil are currently on the rise. Six months ago it was almost unheard of that the MM would use intimidation tactics to publicly enforce their Shi'a Islamist vision in Babil, whereas today such activities are growing ever more commonplace.

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ATTACK ON AL-FAYHAA NEWSPAPER  
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¶9. (S) On May 14, MM threatened Al-Fayhaa newspaper, a local independent publication in Al-Hillah, for reportedly publishing anti-Sadr articles. Later the same day the MM assaulted the homes of two of the paper's editors with grenades. Babil police confirmed that the MM targeted the newspaper because it was considering publication of a story detailing a supposed pact between the MM, Badr Corps and Da'wa Party to divide up Babil into distinct parts. During a separate interview, Saad M. Anad (strictly protect), an Iraqi businessman and contact of REO staff, confirmed that Al-Fayhaa considered publishing this exact story. Additionally, the newspaper previously reported that the MM severely beat and hospitalized a cell-phone shop owner for selling pornographic material.

¶10. (S) After the May 14 attack on the two editors, Al-Fayhaa retracted the story about the MM attack upon the cell-phone shop owner and decline to publish the article about the alleged Shi'a Islamist pact to divide up Babil. A May 17 article declared, "A peaceful solution has taken place and everybody is satisfied. Our newspaper would like to apologize for publishing false news. That occurred because our sources were not accurate and had personal agendas." After the retraction, Al-Fayhaa has started publishing pro-MM articles, including ubiquitously printing Al-Sadr's picture on almost every page.

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MADHI CLOSURE OF A USAID SPONSORED EVENT  
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¶11. (S) On May 30, approximately sixteen armed MM members raided an America's Democracy Foundation (ADF) sponsored outdoor public event for students in downtown Al-Hillah, and subsequently closed the affair. According to eyewitness accounts, the MM members entered the venue at approximately 10:30am and shut it down because it violated Al-Sadr's fatwa against playing non-religious music in public. Witnesses also reported that the twenty-five Al-Hillah police who were responsible for guarding the location stood-down and allowed the MM entry onto the site. The witnesses, however, softened their statements by adding that the IPs refused to resist because of the high probability of inadvertently inflicting civilian casualties.

¶12. (S) In a recent meeting, Colonel Mohammed Husseni Al-Jubori Abass, the Babil Police Chief's deputy, confirmed the eyewitness

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accounts. Abass also added that the Babil Police Chief General Qais fired the commander of the unit responsible for security at the site, and had secured arrest warrants from the Al-Hillah judiciary for the MM members involved. Colonel Abass claimed that at the time of the incident he and General Qais were meeting with U.S. military commanders and therefore were unable to direct the IPs to protect the event.

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THE MADHI MILITIA AND THE BABIL POLICE  
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¶13. (S) During a June 2 meeting, REO and PRT staff asked Al-Hillah Mayor Imad Lefta about his impression of the MM raid on the ADF celebration. The Mayor stated that it was a scandal that the IPs under Qais failed to protect innocent Iraqi civilians. He added that the IP failure was hardly surprising as most police in Al-Hillah are a "bunch of mercenaries who are

terrified of the Sadrists." Lefta specifically warned REO and PRT staff that while General Qais and the ISF of Babil fully desire to eliminate the MM threat, they possess neither the resources nor the manpower to accomplish this task. The Mayor, also concerned with what he termed as the growing influence of the Badr Corps in the province (septel), stated that the good people of Al-Hillah are now living between two militias. He stressed two points concerning this issue: One, that the recent wave of MM violence is intended to increase visibility of the organization in anticipation of upcoming provincial and local elections and two, the brewing tension between the MM and Badr Corps is artificially fuelled by the Iranians in order to weaken Iraq.

¶14. (S/NF) Politically, some Sadrist members of the Babil Provincial Council have supported the besieged Babil Police Chief (reftel A, B and C) and have told REO and PRT contacts that the secular Shi'a General is the only individual with the capabilities to stabilize the Province and counter the SCIRI dominated PC. Other reports indicate that MM-Babil police cooperation runs on a much deeper level. A few U.S. military reports suggest that the militia provides the Babil Police, and specifically Al-Hillah SWAT with human intelligence, primarily directed at Sunnis concentrated in the northern part of the province. One report even states that an unidentified Al-Hillah SWAT member attends MM meetings in Iskandariyah so that the two groups can coordinate actions.

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CREATING SECTARIAN AND TRIBAL STRIFE  
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¶15. (S) Documents captured by U.S. military units in northern Babil indicate that the MM plans to carry out covert attacks on Sunni population centers designed to sustain fighting between the Sunnis and CF. One such MM document detailed information on how individual commanders could instigate tribal conflicts to fuel the already tense security situation. During a May 27 security briefing at the REO, Iraqi Second Brigade Commander Colonel Hatim Al-Husseiny detailed recent fighting between the Al-Gharran (Shi'a) and Al-Ubaid (Sunni) tribes on the Babil-Wasit provincial border. According to Hatim, the Iraqi Army (IA), with the assistance of Babil IPs, had successfully intervened and ended the conflict.

¶16. (S) Hatim further stated that during the operation, the IA killed twenty-one MM. When REO staff asked how the IA killed MM during operations to end a tribal dispute, Hatim replied, "these conflicts occurred since the fall of the old regime and the militias do get involved." General Qais, more bluntly, related to REO and PRT staff that Iran supports all militias in order to "bleed Iraq dry" and that Iranian intelligence encourages MM leadership to instigate tribal conflicts. Other reports indicate that Shi'a tribes contract JAM/MM for protection services against Sunni tribes.

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COMMENT  
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¶17. (S) By all accounts, MM activity is on the rise in Babil and designed to impose their own religious interpretations upon the province while at the same diminish SCIRI/Badr power. The recent wave of attacks suggests a few key points. First, the militia is becoming ever more organized and better able to carry out actions, even if such attacks are only against targets of opportunity. Second, the Babil security forces are not able to neutralize or isolate this threat alone. Finally, MM strategy in the province is relatively simple. Local commanders engage targets to demonstrate their strength, whether it be against public events, independent media outlets or kinetic action against the provincial security forces. This does not mean the MM intends to solve their political difficulties with SCIRI (or

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any other group) through force of arms. Instead, these actions

are meant to enforce a continued and overt presence that will have direct political benefits in the upcoming local and provincial elections.

[¶](#)18. (U) This cable was cleared by the U.S. Army's Second Brigade Combat Team.

MEURS